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# *Aeneid* 5: Poetry and Parenthood

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## *Aeneid* 5: Poetry and Parenthood

### **Abstract**

The main events and themes of Book 5 relate powerfully to the motif of generations. The hero holds memorial celebrations on the anniversary of his father's death; in the games that mark these celebrations, Trojan contestants are linked by their names and characters to the prominent Roman families that they will found; and the hero's son leads the other boys, who recall by name and appearance their distinguished Trojan ancestors, in a performance of what future Roman generations will call the "Troy game." The games of Book 5 are also notable for having occasioned at least one classic critical assessment in modern times of Vergil's epic technique vis a vis that of his greatest model, Homer; and in recent years, students of epic have come almost reflexively to figure the relationship between Homer and Vergil as one between father and son, full of anxiety and Oedipal overtones. Thus the dominant theme of the poetry itself finds its parallel in a leading theme of the critical discourse that has grown up around it. As a result, the fifth book of the *Aeneid* offers an ideal opportunity to study the mutually defining relationship between poetry and interpretation.

### **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Classics

## CHAPTER 5

# *AENEID 5*

### Poetry and Parenthood

*Joseph Farrell*

The main events and themes of Book 5 relate powerfully to the motif of generations. The hero holds memorial celebrations on the anniversary of his father's death; in the games that mark these celebrations, Trojan contestants are linked by their names and characters to the prominent Roman families that they will found; and the hero's son leads the other boys, who recall by name and appearance their distinguished Trojan ancestors, in a performance of what future Roman generations will call the "Troy game." The games of Book 5 are also notable for having occasioned at least one classic critical assessment in modern times of Vergil's epic technique vis à vis that of his greatest model, Homer; and in recent years, students of epic have come almost reflexively to figure the relationship between Homer and Vergil as one between father and son, full of anxiety and Oedipal overtones. Thus the dominant theme of the poetry itself finds its parallel in a leading theme of the critical discourse that has grown up around it. As a result, the fifth book of the *Aeneid* offers an ideal opportunity to study the mutually defining relationship between poetry and interpretation.

We may begin by inquiring into the relationship between the hero and the father whose death these games commemorate. How do these games, this poetry, illuminate that relationship?

It is no secret that Aeneas has been viewed by many readers as, shall we say, heroically challenged. This is particularly the case in the first half of the poem, in which we are introduced to a hero who longs to have died at Troy (1.92–101, M 131–43), who narrates a long sequence of debilitating experiences beginning with the traumatic final night of his native city and continuing with an erroneous sequence of wanderings lasting seven years<sup>1</sup>

and taking him throughout the Mediterranean in search of a new home. Instead of a home Aeneas finds himself in a foreign country and becomes involved in a love affair from which he extracts himself with difficulty, precipitating the suicide of a woman who had generously received him and his people into her own city. These events, the narrative of Books 1–4, paint the picture not of a commanding figure who would, by establishing a revised pattern of heroism, call into being a new world order and give his name to the Roman national epic, but rather of a helpless refugee unable to escape from a home world that has irrevocably vanished and to find his way in the unfamiliar lands beyond.

It is in Book 5 that Aeneas begins to reassemble the pieces of his shattered life and to come into his own as the leader that he must be. He does so, significantly, by returning to the point from which he had departed just before the poem opens, that is, by retracing his steps to Sicily, the last stop before the storm at sea that takes the Trojans to Carthage in Book 1.<sup>2</sup> The narrative thus, and in a rather obvious way, “starts over” in Book 5, and, in the process, sets Aeneas moving, though not without obstacle, in the direction that fate requires.

He moves, moreover, under his own leadership. Previously in the poem Aeneas had relied heavily on his father, Anchises, for moral support and practical guidance as he labored to take his Trojans to a new home. Anchises, of course, both in his initial refusal to leave Troy at all and in his frustrated efforts subsequently to understand the will of the gods, often failed to provide his son with the guidance he needed; but it is after and in fact immediately upon Anchises’ death that Aeneas involves himself in the most grievous error of all, his Carthaginian sojourn. The return to Anchises’ grave must, then, represent an effort on Aeneas’ part to reestablish some connection with the father who had been his moral compass or, alternatively, to come to terms with and to assume the mantle of leadership that has awaited him since his father’s death.

Aeneas’ growth as a leader is made clear, tragically and painfully, by definite tokens. In Book 3 when his pilot, Palinurus, is named for the first time, he and his band are unable to find their way in bad weather.

“continuo venti voluunt mare magnaue surgunt  
 aquora, dispersi iactamur gurgite vasto;  
 involvere diem nimbi et nox umida caelum  
 abstulit, ingeminant abruptis nubibus ignes,

excitimur cursu et caecis erramus in undis.  
 ipse diem noctemque negat discernere caelo  
 nec meminisse viae media Palinurus in unda."

(3.196–202)

"And we are scattered, tossed upon the vast  
 abyss; clouds cloak the day; damp night annuls  
 the heavens; frequent lightning fires flash  
 through the tattered clouds; cast from our course, we wander  
 across the blind waves. Even Palinurus  
 can not tell day from night upon the heavens,  
 can not recall our way among the waters."

(M 260–66)

Palinurus' frustration follows and is of a piece with Anchises' confused inability just a few lines previously to interpret an oracle. Apollo of Delos had commanded the Trojans to "seek out [their] ancient mother" (*antiquam exquirite matrem*, 3.96, M 128)—a command that should steer the Trojans toward Italy, but that Anchises wrongly interprets as indicating Crete. In these cases neither of the hero's principal guides, his helmsman and his father, can provide the direction that he needs. At the beginning of Book 5, however, Palinurus reappears to state confidently in the face of another storm that he can indeed find his way back to Sicily, which he successfully does; and in the main episode of the book, Aeneas himself begins to take on the role of father that has been symbolically vacant since Anchises' death. This apparently cheering development ends tragically, however, as Aeneas' succession to roles of leadership real and symbolic, is completed at the end of the book. Just as his accession to the role of father required Anchises' death, so must the reader witness the death of Palinurus before Aeneas himself can occupy the helmsman's position in the stern of the ship for the final passage to Italy (827–71, M 1093–152).

If such symbols mean anything, then whatever has happened in Book 5 seems to have imbued the hero for the first time with an ability to dispense with the support of lesser figures, to lay the ghost of his father to rest, and to lead under his own auspices. Certainly the emphasis placed by Book 5 on Aeneas' paternity, real and symbolic, appears in many forms. As is often noted, the word "father" occurs more often in this book than in any other part of the poem.<sup>3</sup> It is equally clear, however, that whatever success Aeneas may enjoy in the safe and restricted play world of Anchises'

memorial games, the son does not manage to supplant his dead father altogether. The games end abruptly when the Trojan women—themselves repeatedly designated as “mothers”—are goaded by Juno through her minion Iris to set fire to the ships in an effort to prevent the last leg of the Trojans’ journey to Italy. This event plunges Aeneas into depression and indecision, revealing that he is still so unready for leadership he cannot even recognize as such the good advice given him by Nautes, one of the Trojan elders—namely, to leave behind any who are unwilling to face the rigors of the Italian wars that lie ahead, but to press on with only the hardest members of his band. Only when Anchises himself appears in a dream and gives Aeneas precisely the same advice is the hero confirmed in the course he will follow. When Anchises adds that his son should undertake a journey to the Underworld to confer with him about the challenges he will face in Italy, we understand that the symbolic processes of expiation, reconciliation, and growth that inform Book 5 have not been enough—that the death of the father still weighs on the son, that he can successfully contend with this loss only by overcoming it in fact, which he does in the katabasis episode of Book 6.

Thus the relationship between Aeneas and Anchises is fraught with contradictions. The hero’s father is both a comfort and a burden to him, a source of guidance and inspiration as well as an insurmountable challenge. Comfort is what Aeneas remembers most when he briefly tells Dido about Anchises’ death:

“hinc Drepani me portus et inlaetabilis ora  
accipit. hic pelagi tot tempestatibus actus  
heu, genitorem, omnis curae casusque levamen,  
amitto Anchisen. hic me, pater optime, fessum  
deseris, heu, tantis nequiquam erepte periclis!”  
(3.707–18)

“Then Drepanum’s unhappy coast and harbor  
receive me. It is here—after all  
the tempests of the sea—I lose my father,  
Anchises, stay in every care and crisis.  
For here, o best of fathers, you first left  
me to my weariness, alone—Anchises,  
you who were saved in vain from dreadful dangers.”  
(M 915–21)

But later, in taking his leave of Dido, Aeneas reveals (what the reader has not been shown) that he also regards his father in a more frightening aspect:

"me patris Anchisae, quotiens umentibus umbris  
nox operit terras, quotiens astra ignea surgunt,  
admonet in somnis et turbida terret imago"  
(4.351-53)

"For often as the night conceals the earth  
with dew and shadows, often as the stars  
ascend, afire, my father's anxious<sup>4</sup> image  
approaches me in dreams. Anchises warns  
and terrifies . . ."

(M 477-81)

And, of course, the image of the hero carrying the crippled old man out of the burning city, with the boy Ascanius struggling along beside, is perhaps the most potent expression of Aeneas' position as father and son, gifted and burdened with responsibility and leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Turning from these literary contradictions to the metaliterary relationship between Vergil and Homer, we find that similar patterns can be discerned. If indeed we see Aeneas as a hero manqué, we are judging him by the standard not of Anchises, but of Odysseus and Achilles; and if we find Vergil wanting as an epic poet, we are judging him in comparison to Homer. Aeneas, unlike the Greek heroes on whom he is modeled, is the social hero par excellence—which to some has meant he is no hero at all. By the same token Vergil is, so to speak, the imitative poet par excellence—which to some has meant he is no poet at all, or at any rate a severely impaired one. Neither Aeneas nor Vergil truly stands on his own: each depends on some important predecessor against whom we are invited to measure the success of both hero and poet. In contrast Homer, like his heroes, appears to us in splendid isolation. Just as Odysseus and, even more so, Achilles win undying fame alone and on their own terms, Homer too stands apart. To insist that Homer's isolation is only apparent because we can know hardly anything about the long tradition from which he descends, about the names or qualities of his poetic fathers, is beside the point; for these conditions can never change enough to alter our basic conception of Homer as an, and in some sense the, "original" poet. Vergil is, on the other hand, frankly derivative,

and recognition of this fact has long been one of the defining parameters with which all readers of the *Aeneid* have had to contend.

The parallel experiences of Aeneas, the derivative hero, and of Vergil, the derivative poet, speak to the inherent ambivalences of the father/son relationship. It is no accident that Book 5's extensive imitation of a Homeric episode involves a series of contests.<sup>6</sup> Aeneas' succession of Anchises is a far from uncomplicated matter. One infers that the motif of the games signals that "pater Aeneas" is in some sense competing with "pater Anchises." By the same token Vergil's decision to try his hand at an episode of games signals not merely homage to, but competition with, Homer as well. Servius, the most important of Vergil's surviving ancient critics, begins his commentary on the *Aeneid* by stating that Vergil's intention in composing it was "to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus through his ancestors." This remark does not explicitly represent imitation of Homer as simply paying homage to a literary ancestor, nor do Servius' comments elsewhere suggest that he viewed literary paternity and filiation as an uncomplicated relationship. In fact, along with other ancient critics, he more readily speaks in terms of rivalry, and judges Homer as beyond even Vergil's reach. Of Book 5 in particular he states that "the greater part of this book is taken from Homer, for everything that our poet mentions can be seen happening around the tomb of Patroclus [i.e., in *Iliad* 23], except there you have a chariot race, here a boat race." It is difficult not to infer from such a remark that Servius regarded Vergil's dependence on Homer in this book as transparent, somewhat excessive, and perhaps even unsuccessful.

This opinion has played a dominant role in the assessment of Book 5 and of the poem as a whole. To be sure, the passage of time has involved some critical ebb and flow; certainly Vergil has occasionally enjoyed the ascendancy over Homer that Servius denies him. This ascendancy, however, has tended to coincide with periods when Homer's poetry was not well known in the West, and it is generally correct to state that Vergil has most often been viewed as Homer's not altogether successful imitator. In fact, Book 5—possibly because it is so openly imitative of Homer—has often been felt to be one of the less successful books of the poem.<sup>7</sup>

Early in this century, however, Richard Heinze in his epoch-making study of Vergil's epic technique subjected Anchises' memorial games to a detailed scrutiny vis à vis Homer's funeral games for Patroclus in order to illuminate what is most distinctive about Vergil's style.<sup>8</sup> For Heinze, Vergil departs from Homer in order to impose a classical aesthetic canon on the exuberance of earlier epic. Thus the eight events of Homer's games are



trimmed to four; Homer's simple arrangement of contests, which moves from longer to shorter episodes, becomes a more elaborate, interlocking sequence of major and minor events; and the entire narrative moves to a more powerful climax in the archery contest. Even the individual events become more complex, as in the case of the boxing match.<sup>9</sup> In Homer's contest, Epeius boasts that he will defeat any challenger, and then proceeds to do just that. Dares in *Aeneid* 5 is clearly modeled on this character, but he is further endowed with a degree of psychological complexity (though young and powerful, he is also inexperienced and overconfident) that is lacking in the Homeric "original." Vergil allows Dares to start strong, but after a fall, his aged challenger, Entellus, pupil of the hero Eryx, rises and beats the braggart senseless, forcing Aeneas to intervene to save Dares' life:

Tum pater Aeneas procedere longius iras  
et saevire animis Entellum haud passus acerbis,  
sed finem imposuit pugnae fessumque Dareta  
eripuit mulcens dictis ac talia fatur:  
"infelix, quae tanta animum dementia cepit?  
non viris alias conversa que numina sentis?  
cede deo."

(461-67)

But then father Aeneas would not let  
such fury go unchecked; he would not have  
Entellus rage in bitterness. He stopped  
the boxing, snatched away exhausted Dares,  
and when he spoke to him, used soothing words:  
"Poor man, what madness has possessed your mind?  
Your forces are not matched—can't you see that?—  
The gods have shifted to the other side.  
Give way to heaven."

(M 611-19)

This peripeteia points to another crucial difference in the Vergilian games: their emphasis on the piety of the victors as the basis of their physical or technical prowess. The change in emphasis is related to a difference in style. Heinze's arguments were extended by Brooks Otis, who characterizes Homer's narrative style as "objective," or concerned to describe things, events, and people from an external perspective, as against Vergil's

"subjective" style, which in Otis's view allows the reader to enter into the poem as if from the perspective of a participant.<sup>10</sup> Thus Vergil's narrative is about the inner lives of the contestants—about Sergestus' recklessness, Nisus' love for Euryalus, Dares' arrogance, Acestes' favored relationship with the gods. Heinze and Otis carefully avoid arguing openly that these differences prove Vergil's superiority to Homer (although Otis, especially when celebrating Vergil's more "civilized" qualities, comes close). Nevertheless, it is difficult not to see in the work of these scholars an effort to read Vergil as succeeding in his struggle with a powerful poetic father, and in this sense as being engaged in a metaliterary struggle that closely resembles the hero's efforts to assimilate and to revise for his own purposes a paternal legacy that simultaneously sustains and threatens to oppress him.

In this respect, *Aeneid* 5 appears to be an ideal instantiation of everything Harold Bloom means when he speaks of literary influence as a process closely akin to Freud's notion of what takes place in the mind of a son trying to imagine himself as a father.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the validity of reading Book 5 in these terms only is very much open to question. We must consider from a different perspective the generational relationships developed within the book and ask not just what has been written into the history of these relations but what critics have written out. If we return for a moment to Servius' statement that "the greater part of the book is taken from Homer, except that Homer has a chariot race, Vergil a boat race," it should be obvious both how inadequate and, in both senses, how partial this analysis is. If we realize this much, it becomes equally obvious that those critics who have labored to establish Vergil's equality with or superiority to Homer by arguing for his originality even in these extraordinarily imitative games are at bottom simply accepting and reinforcing the terms that the ancient commentator laid down. Rather than doing the same, we should at least ask the question: Is "the greater part" of the book in fact a literary and metaliterary agon between pairs of fathers and sons, Anchises and Aeneas, Homer and Vergil? Or does this formulation leave something out?

Servius' position is far from unassailable. To be sure, by a crude form of measurement, the memorial games for Anchises occupy more than half the book: Aeneas assembles his followers for the first sacrifice to his father's spirit at line 43 (M 57); the climax of the celebration, the Troy game, concludes at line 603 (M 793–94) with the words *hac celebrata tenus sancto certamina patri* ("Such were the competitions they observed / in

honor of Aeneas' holy father.") But neither the sacrifice (which actually takes place several days before the games themselves) nor the pageant of the Troy game owes anything to the Homeric games narrative, imitation of which is confined to lines 104–545 (M 144–715). The remaining Homeric sequence is still substantial, but the exemplary status of the games in the critical literature tends to obscure the fact that Book 5 comprises two additional major episodes: the burning of the ships and the death of Palinurus. Neither of these episodes involves a contest or owes much to Homer, and neither is greatly elucidated by the assumption that writing poetry is an agonistic pursuit carried out by wayward and rebellious sons against powerful, controlling fathers.

In the final episode involving Palinurus' death, the symbolism of Aeneas' replacing the lost helmsman seems both clear enough and perfectly consonant with the dominant motif of the son succeeding to the role of father. Michael Putnam, however, in his masterly discussion of Book 5, actually inverts the relationship between these motifs, making the theme of sacrifice as represented by the death of Palinurus into the chief unifying element of the book.<sup>12</sup> Anchises on this reading is not so much Aeneas' father as yet another in a series of individuals whom the hero loses on his way to Italy. Putnam thus reads the episode—and, in the terms of his argument, all of Book 5—as essentially independent of the anxious Homeric influence that other critics find in the games and infer throughout the entire book. This is a powerful, liberating reading that, in my opinion, is obviously right. At the same time, it does not obviate Homer entirely. Indeed, if one insists on reading the sacrificial motif against a Homeric background, there may be a satisfying irony at work. From the un-Homeric episode of Palinurus' death emerges the theme of lost companions, which in fact will be anchored to Homer through the very figure of Palinurus in Book 6, where the helmsman plays the role of the Odyssean Elpenor. Thus Aeneas, the social hero who in Book 1 contrasts so strongly with the isolated Odysseus even as he (unwittingly) quotes the very words of his Greek prototype—"O, three and four times blessed / were those who died before their fathers' eyes / beneath the walls of Troy" (*"o terque quaterque beati, / quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis / contigit oppetere!"*, 1.94–96, M 133–35)—is revealed to be like Odysseus after all, repeatedly sacrificing companions on the altar of his own success. Not dissimilarly Vergil, leaving behind his Homeric model in Palinurus' death scene, constructs one of his most memorable and moving episodes and, here if anywhere, shows the distinctive qualities that make him a true rival (or

companion) to Homer as a writer of tremendous emotional and intellectual richness and complexity, and as a poet for the ages.

The central episode of the book, the burning of the ships, presents a rather different interpretive challenge. Like the Palinurus episode it stands in dark contrast to the sunny celebration of the games and (à la Putnam) relates closely to the theme of sacrifice and lost companions. Unlike either the games or the loss of the helmsman, however, this episode represents the book's greatest challenge to Aeneas' leadership. Indeed, the hero's helpless response to this disaster must be felt to gainsay the optimistic reading that understands Aeneas' performance as president of the memorial games or his act of occupying his lost helmsman's place in the stern of his (now rudderless) ship as marking him as a mature, successful leader at last.

The burning of the ships can be related to the hero's succession of his father as a leader, but not without a certain amount of special pleading. The loss of several ships leaves Aeneas uncertain how to proceed and necessitates a more direct reestablishment of contact with his dead father than the games could effect. It has been suggested that this destruction actually strengthens Aeneas. In response to the loss of the ships, the hero follows Nautes' (and then Anchises') advice to establish a city on Sicily under Acestes and to leave there the women, the old, the feeble, and any others who lack the courage to face the challenges that Italy holds. Aeneas is thus able to enter the Iliadic half of the poem heroically accompanied by a quasi-Homeric *Männerbund* instead of by the sorrowful collection of refugees he has dragged along up to this point. Similarly, the hero's momentary indecision in the wake of the disaster motivates the appearance of Anchises in a dream bidding that Aeneas descend to Elysium, where father and son meet again at last and from which meeting the hero emerges able to face any challenge that may arise.

Thus the burning of the ships does advance Aeneas' mission, though the deed is perhaps better characterized as a *felix culpa* rather than as an actual contribution. Beyond this, however, the episode is generally taken as a textbook illustration of the strong dichotomy between male and female elements in the *Aeneid*: the Trojan women "burn" under Juno's influence with a passionate unreason that leads them literally to burn their ships in order to prevent the crossing to Italy. The women are, as I noted above, repeatedly called "mothers," and this coloration is felt to contrast sharply with the theme of fathers and sons in the memorial games. The full implications of this dichotomy are most clearly viewed from a feminist perspective: the master narrative of western patriarchy figures the succession of generations

as a sequence of sons struggling to prove themselves worthy of heroic fathers, to become fathers in their own right, and to beget sons worthy of themselves and of their ancestors. Mothers have no place in this succession, or a small one; whatever role they play after giving birth threatens to retard the ephebe's progress and threaten his maturation as a hero.

A powerful critique along just these lines has been mounted by S. Georgia Nugent.<sup>13</sup> Accepting the idea that the games narrative "is strongly determined by the father/son relation"<sup>14</sup> and reading Vergil's imitation of Homeric material in explicitly Bloomian terms,<sup>15</sup> Nugent goes on to argue that "the Trojan women are constructed here as the quintessential Other."<sup>16</sup> In support of this claim, she notes, the women are segregated from the men, treated as a collective entity, and misrepresented through the ventriloquism of a patriarchal text.

Nugent's commentary on the role of the Trojan women is forceful and important. Certainly relegation of female characters to futile oppositional roles is a familiar trope of *Aeneid* criticism, borne out by abundant textual evidence. But there is even in such a committedly feminist argument a high degree of unwarranted complicity with the narrowly paternalistic readings that have dominated *Aeneid* criticism. To argue that Vergil's treatment of the Trojan mothers is utterly consistent with a starkly androcentric ideology of gender is very much at odds with many contrasting gestures present throughout the poem and by no means absent from Book 5. Specifically, the Trojan women are not the only mothers, nor is Anchises the only parent whose influence is felt in this book. In fact, it is Venus who furthers her son's cause far more than does his father. Through her powerful symbolic presence and behind-the-scenes machinations against his enemies, she provides assistance not by endowing Aeneas with a greater capacity to lead, but by working against his enemies herself, making sure of his supporters in the world of the divine.

Venus' presence is quietly established at several points in the narrative of Book 5 where critics have been quicker to see the mark of Anchises. If we view the action of the book from the perspective of the narrative moment, which is the anniversary of Anchises' death, then he will indeed appear as the dominant figure. But if on the other hand we adopt a larger perspective, we will understand Anchises' much more limited place in a hierarchy that begins on Olympus and shapes the narrative of the poem in ways that overwhelm the individual importance of Anchises and Aeneas as fathers or leaders. From this perspective, the pervasive importance of Venus relegates Anchises to a clearly inferior role.

Earlier I adduced Palinurus' first appearance in Book 5 to examine a motif that makes of him an analogue to Anchises and of the return to Sicily a gesture of filial piety. But looking up at a threatening sky, the helmsman asks the ominous question, "Father Neptune / what are you preparing?" ("*quidve, pater Neptune, paras?*", 5.14, M 17-18). It is the immediate danger of inclement weather that Palinurus fears, of course, never dreaming that on the next leg of the journey to Italy he himself will become the one sacrifice Neptune demands to insure the safe passage of the many. And it is no accident that Palinurus addresses this threatening Neptune as a "father" who brings the Trojans neither aid nor comfort. But in these circumstances more welcome familial ties suggest themselves: Sicily is at hand, and Palinurus is sure he can steer a course to landfall there that same day:

"superat quoniam Fortuna, sequamur,  
quoque vocat vertamus iter. nec litora longe  
fida reor fraterna Erycis portusque Sicanos,  
si modo rite memor servata remetior astra."

(22-25)

"Since Fortune has the better of us now,  
let us obey and turn aside where she  
has called. I think the faithful shores of Eryx,  
your brother, and Sicilian ports are not  
far off, if only I remember right  
and can retrace the stars I watched before."

(M 30-35)

These "faithful shores of Eryx, your brother" take their name from the son of Venus and Butes, who is therefore half-brother to Aeneas. It is this connection on the mother's side that Palinurus cites when he recommends a return to Sicily. Aeneas accepts Palinurus' suggestion; but, as if in rejoinder, he accepts on the grounds that Anchises, not Eryx, is buried there and, shortly after landing, determines that his father should receive cult. Aeneas' celebration seems almost an attempt to establish Anchises as a local hero alongside or in place of Eryx. But Palinurus' mention of fraternal shores proves to be only the first in a series of references to Eryx throughout Book 5. The memory of this hero and legendary boxer inspires his pupil, Entellus, to answer the challenge issued by the braggart Dares (392, M 518), and it is to him that Entellus sacrifices his victor's prize (483-84, M 639-41).

Because they are in Eryx' homeland where Acestes rules, Iris/Beroe can convince the Trojan mothers that it would be an appropriate place for them to make their settlement (630, M 830).<sup>17</sup> Upon founding this new city, Acestes establishes a cult to Venus on the peak of Mount Eryx, with a grove nearby in honor of her consort, the hero Anchises (759–61, M 1000–1003). Finally, the Trojans at their departure sacrifice to Eryx and to the Tempests to ensure safe passage to Italy (772–73, M 1016–18). Finally, the power behind the hero is disclosed in the scene that immediately follows as mother Venus procures safe passage for Aeneas by bartering Palinurus' life to father Neptune.

These references to Eryx, Aeneas' maternal half-brother, and to Venus, his mother, occur at significant moments throughout Book 5 and establish a counterpoint to the theme of paternity represented by Anchises. At the very least, the role of Eryx as epichoric hero should prevent us from regarding Aeneas' return to Sicily exclusively or even primarily as a move into paternal space.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Eryx' identity as Aeneas' half-brother ought to remind us that Venus' (let us say) sphere of influence is much larger than that of Anchises. The motif of the half-brother has appeared earlier in the person of Cupid: in addressing the god of love, Venus actually refers to Aeneas as his brother (1.667, M 934). Later, in Book 8, when Venus brings the full force of her sexual power to bear on her wedded husband, Vulcan, she does not hesitate to cite parental concern as the force that moves her to request new arms for Aeneas—despite the fact that, from Vulcan's point of view, Aeneas is simply the result of the goddess' infidelity to him, an aspect of their marriage to which he has evidently become accustomed. Aeneas' father is but one of Venus' consorts; Butes, father of Eryx, is another. Butes is a nobody, but Eryx, son of Venus, is an important hero in this part of the world. The same line of reasoning applies to Anchises and Aeneas as well. By casting Anchises not so much as Aeneas' father but as just one of Venus' many consorts, the subtext of Book 5 tends to inscribe paternity within a more dominant theme of motherhood.

It is of course not wrong to see paternity as the theme that at crucial moments receives the greater stress: the hero is obviously obsessed with his father and troubled by his own paternal obligations. It seems evident that he must resolve this issue before he can get on with his mission. At the same time, while Aeneas' obsession with Anchises is clearly an important element of Vergil's interest in the psychology of the poem's main character, it is not at all clear that "solving" this problem per se materially advances the hero's cause. Anchises is in all practical respects a hopeless

guide to Aeneas, and whatever strategic counsel he bestows on his son in the Underworld pales in comparison to the apocalyptic pep talk that precedes it. Once again, however, the impression that this scene of revelation makes on the reader in its immediate context does not suggest how utterly the entire experience seems to be forgotten by the hero as he moves through the subsequent narrative. The emphasis of the moment often enough does not reflect the forces that shape the longer view. And time and again it is Venus, the hero's mother, who intervenes in the narrative to make sure that the hero, sometimes despite his will, stays on course. She does so not only by her bargaining with Neptune in Book 5 and with Vulcan in Book 8, but through other interventions as well: at Carthage in Book 1, where she conspires with Juno to insure the Trojans a hospitable reception at Dido's court; at Troy in Book 2, where she reveals to her son the active hostility of the other gods to the falling city; in Book 6, when "his mother's birds" (*maternas . . . avis*, 193, M 262) lead the hero through a grove by Lake Avernus directly to the tree that bears the Golden Bough; and in Book 12, when she rescues Aeneas from a wound dealt "by hand / that is unknown" (*incertum qua pulsa manu*, 12.320, M 433-34). In terms of efficacy, it is consistently not his father who helps Aeneas toward his goal, but rather his mother. *Venus genetrix*, not *pater Anchises*, is the parent who insures her son's success.

Obviously the relationship between Aeneas' parents, and his own relationship to each of them, is wildly asymmetrical. Venus is a goddess and the ancestress of the Roman people; Anchises is but one of many consorts and thus much less important to the goddess than the fruit of their union. Aeneas' obsession with his father may blind him to the fact that it is his mother who helps him at every turn, who actually controls his destiny. Many critics of differing persuasions have inherited this obsession, to the point that the *Aeneid* is often read as the embodiment par excellence of the epic genre as constituted by the relationship between father and son. But the *Aeneid* is a poem of many voices, and the maternal voice is prominent among them.

In sum, attention to the theme of parenthood in *Aeneid* 5 is instructive (as in many other ways) on two particular counts. First, a reading that focuses on the issue of paternity brings out an important aspect of Aeneas' development as a hero. Having lost his own father, who was in some sense a burden to him, he has lost his bearings as well. His task in this book is to bury his father's ghost once and for all and to take upon himself the role of father to his people. Though he does not wholly complete this



task, as the necessity of subsequently visiting Anchises in the Underworld shows, he nevertheless makes some progress. But what progress he makes occurs mainly under the auspices of his mother. It thereby becomes clear that the theme of parenthood is larger than that of paternity, and that the hero's obsession with his father turns his attention from the real source of his success: the sponsorship of his mission and the machinations on his behalf by his divine patroness and mother, Venus. Similarly, the reader's—or better, perhaps, the critic's—obsession with the hero's paternity and with the poet's Oedipal agon against his literary “father” has obscured the importance of feminine elements in the narrative. These elements may well be in tension with their corresponding masculine elements, but exclusive emphasis on one or the other side can only result in a failure to understand what are, after all, mutually defining aspects of the poem's thematic structure.

# READING VERGIL'S *AENEID*

An Interpretive Guide

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